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E. M. Juergenson

California Employers Cooperate in Work Experience

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Jarrold T. Davis

The concept of work experience in vocational education is akin to mother love in society—always taken for granted, of unquestioned virtue, and an integral part of the program.

Since the early days of vocational agriculture, on-the-job training has been obtained through the projects involving ownership. Although work experience has always been recognized as one avenue of learning by doing, the full potential of work experience in many areas of vocational education has barely been scratched.

There are many values to a work-experience program, including a better appreciation of the vocation concerned, a chance to earn money, an opportunity to better decide on a career, and especially a chance to augment classroom instruction through a learning-by-doing experience.

In vocational agriculture the need for supplementing classroom instruction has traditionally been met by some form of supervised practice on a student home farm. In most cases this practice has been realized by a student raising either livestock or

crops, often for competition in a fair or show.

This form of supervised practice has been quite valuable, and for a sizeable percentage of students in vocational agriculture will so continue. However, as the ways people earn a living and spend their leisure time have changed so have the individual student's background and the vocational opportunities changed in a typical class in vocational agriculture. Therefore, many students who are interested in the broad field of agriculture find it impractical and difficult to gain experience through an ownership project. Even if a student does, by some ingenious means, obtain an ownership project, it may not provide the breadth of experience that is provided by working under supervision in the actual job for which he is training.

The vocational agriculture department of the Nevada Union High School, Grass Valley, California, had been using work experience to a limited degree and was interested in discovering the full potential in this

program. For a number of years some 15 to 20 students per year in this school have been placed on farms and in related industries, especially during the summer months, in a work experience program. While the program proved successful, the initiation and to some degree the supervision was happenstance as time permitted.

This department was interested in finding answers to two questions: (1) had the number of students participating in the current school program already saturated the local work experience opportunities, and (2) what would employer reaction be to outside supervision? The school administration was also interested as results of the study could have an implication for a total school effort toward combating drop-outs and making more students employable, including both girls and boys in all vocations.

In order to find answers to these questions, a joint study was organized by the agriculture department of Nevada Union High School and the Agricultural Education Department of